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Joel Overview (Part 1)



Bible Book Overviews - Steve Gregg

In this overview, Steve Gregg explores the Book of Joel, a prophetic message of judgment and hope. The book describes a devastating locust plague that was seen as God's judgment on Judah, leading to starvation and a need for importation of food. However, the latter half of the book provides a message of hope, describing the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost and warning of a future judgment to come if the people do not repent. Overall, the book of Joel provides a message of the importance of repentance and consecration, and how crying out to God can lead to deliverance and restoration.

Transcript

The book of Joel, unlike many of the prophets, perhaps, well, unlike most of them, is somebody we don't know very much about and we don't even know when he lived. This is a book that tells us nothing about the man except for the name of his father, which is Pethuel, mentioned in verse 1. I think we can be fairly certain he lived in Judah rather than in Israel when the nation was divided because the entire prophecy appears to be concerned about problems in Judah. So, it's possible that this was written after the fall of the Northern Kingdom, which was in 722 AD, and quite a few prophets wrote after that fall, but some wrote before.

And the opinions about the time of Joel are very diverse. Some scholars think he might have been the earliest of the minor prophets written, and probably earlier than Amos and Micah and some of those that were contemporary to Isaiah, which would be almost 150 years before the fall of Jerusalem. Others feel that it's one of the latest minor prophets, even perhaps later than the other post-exilic ones.

We only have three post-exilic minor prophets that we know of, and these were written later than any other Old Testament books after the Jews returned from Babylon. And those books, of course, are Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. And there are some who think that the circumstances of Joel point to a time maybe later than that after the exiles had come back.

It's absolutely a book that we don't need to know the answers to this question about. Some books, you do. A lot of the prophetic books are addressing things that we know about that took place in the reigns of this king or another king, and those prophets usually say that they prophesied during the reign of this king or that king in Judah or Israel or both.

But Joel doesn't give us any such information. He simply describes a crisis in Judah, and he refers to it as the Day of the Lord. Now, the expression the Day of the Lord is common in the Old Testament prophets.

It's even common in the New Testament. Most of the time in the epistles, at least, of Paul and Peter, the term Day of the Lord, or as Peter also uses the term Day of God and Paul uses the term Day of Christ, but they all use the term Day of the Lord. I believe that when the New Testament epistles are using that term, they're speaking of the second coming of Christ.

And this would have view of certainly the vast majority of not all the occurrences of that phrase in the New Testament epistles. I'm singling out the epistles because the term does appear in the time of Jesus too, but there is a reference to the Day of the Lord, which is probably before it happened, the AD 70. Now, when Jerusalem fell, the reason I say that is because the Day of the Lord in the Old Testament is very generic.

It's used to speak of the fall of Babylon, which happened in 539 BC. It's used to speak of the fall of the Northern Kingdom. It's used to speak of the fall of various nations, and they didn't all fall at the same time.

It was just the Day of the Lord for them. The Day of the Lord would mean generically a day of judgment from God. A day when God's decided he's waited long enough for them to repent, that he's taken enough abuse and insults from them, and now it's the day that he settles the scores.

That's what the term Day of the Lord means in the Old Testament. In Joel, in particular, the Day of the Lord refers to judgment on Jerusalem and Judah, as is very clear in the book. We do read of the Day of the Lord repeatedly.

Something you'll also notice is that the Day of the Lord, in most of its occurrences in Joel, is associated with darkness and phenomena like the sun and the moon becoming dark, the stars becoming dim, and so forth. Now, if you've been here for any of our earlier prophets, you may remember that I've pointed out that that's also a very common apocalyptic image that the prophets use for many things. For example, the Day of the Lord in Isaiah 13:10 is the fall of Babylon, and it says the sun and the moon will be darkened and the stars will be dim.

Now, that happened at the time of Babylon's fall. We'll find that this expression, which

seems to speak of the disillusion, maybe, of the heavens, if you take some of it literally, is really just a common expression for a disastrous end for whoever it is that's coming under judgment. The lights are going out for them.

The sun and the moon and the stars are being darkened. As far as they're concerned, they won't be seeing them anymore. But also, another overlay of that imagery is that, in many cases, it's quite literal.

Not that the sun really became darkened, but that because of the disasters, usually the burning of cities, the sky was so full of smoke that it dimmed the view of the sun. The sky was darker because of the thick smoke and fire and so forth. And you can see sometimes that that's even stated to be the case.

Sometimes it's stated to be that there are dark clouds that have made it dark. In other words, there's sometimes sort of a natural reference to why the sun goes dark. Other times, it's just talking about all the lights go out.

And so there's more than one layer of meaning to these things. But you'll see, for example, the Day of the Lord is first mentioned in this book, in chapter 1 and verse 15, where it says, Alas, for the day, for the Day of the Lord is at hand, it shall come as a destruction for the Almighty. Now, this one doesn't talk about getting dark, but the next time it's mentioned, chapter 2, verses 1 and 2, it says, Blow the trumpet in Zion, now Zion is Jerusalem, and sound the alarm in my holy mountain, which is Mount Zion.

Let the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the Day of the Lord is coming, for it is at hand, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness. So here, the darkness and gloominess associated with the Day of the Lord is associated with clouds and perhaps natural obstructions, the sun and the moon and the stars. In chapter 2, verse 11, it says, The Lord gives His voice before His army, for His camp is very great, for strong is the one who executes His word, for the Day of the Lord is great and very terrible.

Who can endure it? Now, I think this may be, I'm not sure, this might be the only time it doesn't mention, no, there's two that don't mention the darkness. In the same chapter, chapter 2, in verse 31, it says, The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon into blood before the coming of the great and terrible Day of the Lord. Now, that verse might sound familiar to you because it's quoted in the New Testament, in the book of Acts, along with the words leading up to it.

We'll talk about that, of course, tonight in some detail. But it talks about the Day of the Lord and it talks about the sun being turned to darkness. And in this case, the moon turned to blood.

And again, that is no doubt a natural phenomenon. I don't know how long you've lived in

Southern California, but I lived here back, you know, all my life, actually. I grew up here.

I remember back in the 70s, especially when we were really looking for the second coming of Christ to come immediately because our preachers and teachers told us He would. But there were many times the smog was such that at night you'd look at this and the moon was low enough that it's kind of in the smog layer. That's before they, I guess, had catalytic converters on all the cars and things like that.

But smog was very much worse in the 70s in this area. And the moon was literally fire engine red at times. I mean, it was when you were really eschatologically aware and thinking in terms of, you know, this is the end times and we see a blood red moon.

It would be, oh, wow. You know, that's the blood is the moon is turned to blood. But I realized as a result of that, that to say the moon turned to blood doesn't mean that there was, you know, it turned into blood.

Of course, it just looks red because of the haze and the smoke. And that would be true in ancient times, too, when cities were burning in the sky was full of smoke. The sun would be darkened to the side of those on the earth looking up and the moon would also look like blood.

Then there's another one more reference to the day of the Lord in chapter three in verse 14. Which says multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. The sun and the moon will grow dark and the stars will diminish their brightness.

So several times, first of all, a great number of times the day of the Lord is mentioned as being in view. And apparently we could even say this is the subject of the prophecy is the coming day of the Lord. But it's not a reference to the day of the Lord, like the end of the world day of the Lord, when Jesus comes back and judges the whole world.

It's very clear. And we can see, especially when we read verse one, chapter one and the first half of chapter two, that the day of the Lord is something that was much nearer than the end of the world for them. And it's even identified as to what form it took.

Now, I want to suggest that the day of the Lord, therefore. Because in different passages, the Old Testament refers to different geographical areas, there's experiencing judgment. It's the day of the Lord for them.

It's a term that is used generically. And even in this book, in my opinion, it may not always refer to the same event because there's two basic time frames in this book. One is the time frame of the prophet himself, which takes up almost exactly half of the book.

And that would be, of course, chapters one and two up to up to chapter two, verse twenty eight. But then verse twenty eight begins and it should come past afterward.

Now, that afterward is where this is where Peter begins to quote from Joel and he identifies it's fulfilled the day of Pentecost, which is, of course, hundreds of years after Joel's time.

Now, the day of the Lord prior to that, I believe, is a day of judgment that Joel and his contemporaries were facing. But once you come to the afterward part, which occupies the rest of the book, we're in the New Testament era. And so it's a different day of the Lord that comes on Jerusalem.

I'm going to suggest that while we're going to look at what the day of the Lord was for Judah in the first half of the book, you know, in Joel's time, we don't know the exact year, but we know what it was that was causing the problem. We know what form that judgment took. But it was in Old Testament times.

But the day of the Lord after that came after Pentecost upon Jerusalem happened in AD 70 when Jerusalem was destroyed. And that's that's going to be my frankly, my assumption based on how these passages are used in the New Testament, which we'll look at. I'm just saying that the day of the Lord isn't always the same one.

Depends on the context and the time frame and who it is that's experiencing the day of the Lord. It's just a generic for the day of judgment for them. And different nations are judged at different times.

Now, the form in which the day of the Lord was realized in Joel's time was in the form of a devastating locust plague. You know, if it's the second part of the book that begins to take place at Pentecost, wasn't so fascinating. Then the book of Joel be primarily known for this locust plague because it's described in very extremely graphic terms.

And the disaster is the grief it causes, the despair it causes. And we have to understand that locust plagues are just about the worst thing that can happen to an agrarian society. And in those days, every society was agrarian society.

I mean, they'd have some commercial business going on, but mostly people were farmers and that's they had to be. They couldn't just go to the store and buy food. They had to grow food just like we do.

We just don't remember that we do. You know, we don't we don't think about the farmers as often, but we still depend on it. The thing is, we have all kinds of other things to bolster our economy.

If our economy fails, it's usually going to be because of Wall Street crashing or something like that. It's not going to be usually about farms failing to produce any food. But in an agrarian society, that's as bad as it gets.

Everyone who's got a job, almost everyone's a farmer. And if all of them have crop

failures for whatever reason, I guess the only thing worse than a locust plague would be a drought. Where they get literally no rain for years and don't have any irrigation for some reason.

But this locust plague is described as just it's like the end of the world for these people. And it would certainly be. I don't know how often locust plagues come to the agricultural areas of the United States.

I know they do sometimes. I know there's a very famous story about how the Mormons, when they first came to Utah, their first crops were threatened. By a surprise locust plague.

Locust plague literally does darken the sky. There are literally billions of locusts that show up all at once. And I don't know why they all show up at once, but that's just one of the freaks of nature.

So that billions of locusts suddenly hatch at the same time. And then they start flying in one direction together like a huge army. And once they get hungry, they settle down and they eat everything that is green.

Everything that is plant-based. And although they don't eat meat, they actually will chew through leather bags and things like that. Leather shoes.

When they run out of green stuff to eat. Fortunately, they don't bite people. Because they'd be absolutely irresistible and devastating.

But it's still pretty devastating. If you depended 100% on crops for the survival of your nation. Because they leave nothing.

Locusts leave nothing. They strip the bark off the trees so the trees die. It's just the most terrifying thing that can happen to a farming-based society.

Which essentially all the ancient societies were, except perhaps the early metropolitan areas. But of course, even the metropolitan areas would starve. If all the farmers in their country were afflicted by locusts.

So this is what happens. Now this is seen as a judgment from God on Judah. It does not say what Judah has done wrong.

And it's obviously the kind of thing that could happen. I mean, locust plagues happen from time to time without any obvious reason for them. But Joel, being a prophet, is able to say this is God's judgment.

Now, sometimes when a disaster happens. Like, for example, when Katrina happened. And New Orleans was flooded and people died and horrible things happened.

Everyone was wondering, is that a judgment from God? Or if a tsunami comes and wipes out an island or something. And people say, is that God's doing? Is God angry? And when people ask me that, I always say, I don't know. I'm not a prophet.

I don't know. I mean, these kinds of things can happen for natural causes, obviously. The Bible does not indicate that every time there's a storm, or every time there's a big wave, or every time that there's even a disease that spreads, a pandemic.

The Bible does not say that's always because God has gotten especially angry and is doing something to punish people. These things can happen by nature. Or by laboratories in Wuhan or somewhere.

I mean, other things besides God can be responsible for things. And so, it takes a prophet to know. This is not just a locust plague that we're just unfortunate to be living through.

This is God's hand, and we need to repent. And Joel actually describes the locust plague. Then he calls the people to repentance.

And then he records promises God makes that he will banish the locusts. And restore the years that the locusts have eaten and so forth. So, there's the judgments described.

A call to repentance, of course, naturally follows. And then there's the promise to the repentant. A very common template in the prophets.

In this case, the whole book is one cycle of that template. In larger books like Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel, you see that kind of template repeating. And even in some of the longer, minor prophets.

Sometimes they first list the sins of the people. That's one thing missing from Joel. We don't know what sins God was judging them for on this occasion.

I suppose God expected them to know. I mean, the people who are actually committing the sins are probably aware of what they are doing. But a lot of times, like Isaiah or Jeremiah will list, or Ezekiel, will list the sins of the people.

Then talk about how God is going to react to that and judge them. Then, there's a reference to the need to repent. Then, there's a reference to God delivering them from these present troubles when they repent.

And then there's one more factor. Almost always in these cycles, the prophets will then move to a description of what will happen when the Messiah comes. And this is because any short-term deliverance from present problems that God promises to bring and does bring.

It's always seen as a type of the ultimate salvation that God will bring. That's going to be

the ultimate salvation. That's the purpose of all of history.

His Son coming and saving his people from their sins, basically. So, any salvation God brings from any particular disaster, the prophets always associate that with the saving activity of God in general. And almost never fail to mention that he's going to save their people, ultimately, through the Messiah.

And that's what Joel does, too. His whole book is one such cycle, whereas longer prophets sometimes repeat the cycle. So, you've got at the beginning of the book, chapter 1 and chapter 2 through verse 14.

That's simply, I'm sorry, verse 11. Chapter 2, verse 11. That is simply the description of the judgment that's coming.

Then you have the call to repentance, which begins in chapter 2, verse 12. Kind of runs through the end of the, well, through the end of verse 17. So, 12 through 17, I'd say.

And then there's the promise. If you repent, this is what God will do. And this is the near-term salvation, the near-term deliverance from their problems.

And that's verses 18, chapter 2, verses 18 through 27. And then, of course, that near-term deliverance invites the prophet to look further off into the future when God will deliver his people in the ultimate eternal sense through the Messiah. And that begins in chapter 2, verse 28 and runs through the rest of the book.

So, we have these four elements in the same order they usually occur in the prophets. Now, the locust plague, as it is described in the beginning, indicates that it's an extremely, an unusually severe one. Though any locust plague is so severe it's terrifying.

But it seems to be associated with years, not just one year, not just one season of destruction of crops that they could recover from the next year. But there are at least two or more years. And we know that because he says in chapter 2 and verse 25, he says, So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locusts have eaten.

So, apparently years of crops have been lost to this. That's pretty unusual. And it indicates that there's waves of locust plagues.

If you look at chapter 1, verse 4, it says, Now, it sounds like there's like four different kinds of locusts. As soon as one's done, the next one, you know, takes its shift and eats more. And then apparently some more things spring up in the next wave of locusts, take those.

It's just wave after wave of locusts. Now, by the way, these references to the chewing locusts, the swarming locusts, the crawling locusts, and the consuming locusts, scholars are not sure. It either is referring to different species of locusts, different varieties of

locusts, or, as many commentators have suggested, it may be just different stages in the locust's life cycle.

Like many insects, of course, the locust begins with the larval stage, and then it develops its wings and legs and things like that. And so at different stages of its maturity, these four different kinds of locusts are split into just four stages of the same locust, who last apparently a long time, or several generations of them come and go. We can't solve that one because there are commentators on both sides.

Some think it's different species. Of course, it's not necessary. The point that he's making is if you escape the first wave, don't be too encouraged.

The next group's going to come and take what's left. And if something springs up after that, don't be encouraged because another batch is going to take it. And it's going to last for some years, even if it's two years.

It would be devastating. Imagine a farming community having two years with no crops. Many people would starve unless they can import food from somewhere further away.

So this is how severe it is. It kind of recalls the Egyptian plague of locusts. Remember when Moses threatened Pharaoh and brought ten plagues on Egypt? The eighth one was a locust plague, and that's found in Exodus chapter 10.

And there's a couple of things in Joel that call to mind Exodus chapter 10 and the locust plague there. For example, in Exodus 10, well, in Joel 1.3, Joel 1.3 says this. Tell your children about it.

Let your children tell their children and their children another generation. Now, this reference to passing this information down for several generations also is found in connection with the locust plague in Exodus chapter 10. And verse 2, it says, Moses is threatening Pharaoh with this plague, he says, and that you may tell it in the hearing of your son and your son's son, the mighty things that I've done in Egypt.

So this is going to be passed down for some generations. They're not going to want to forget this. And that's what Joel says about his locust plague, too.

Interestingly, though, also in Joel chapter 2, verse 2, it says, it's a day of darkness. That's a long verse. Let me get down to the second half of that verse.

A people come great and strong, the like of which has never been, nor will there ever be any such after them, even for many successive generations. That says there's never been a plague like this and there won't be any for a long time to come. In fact, there won't be any, at least for many generations, he says.

Well, in Exodus chapter 10, which is talking about that locust plague, verse 14, as it

describes, it says, and the locusts went up over all the land of Egypt and rested on the territory of Egypt. They were very severe. Previously, there had been no such locusts as they, nor shall there be such after them.

So it's interesting that these two, these phrases are not used all the time for every plague. For example, I don't think there is for any of the other plagues in Egypt, but he warns him, this is something you're going to want to write home about. You're going to want to put this in your journal.

Tell it to your kids. Make sure your grandkids even know about why. To warn them not to bring such things upon themselves as we brought upon ourselves.

And when they come, they say, well, these are locusts like there never have been before or ever will be afterwards. And both statements are said essentially about the locust plague in Joel also. So it seems to deliberately echo that judgment that came on Egypt now coming on Jerusalem.

And by the way, that may be significant in that in the book of Revelation, there's also a locust plague. And in Revelation nine is where we read of it. But in Revelation 11, eight, Jerusalem is referred to as the city that is spiritually called Egypt.

And Sodom. Revelation 11, eight says that they, there's dead bodies lay in the streets of that city that is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt. Where our Lord was crucified.

Well, we know where our Lord was crucified, that's Jerusalem. And that's the city apparently that's spiritually called Egypt and Sodom. Now, in God's mind, Jerusalem, when it has become apostate, is like another Egypt.

May be significant here because Egypt was judged with a locust plague, a uniquely severe one. And now Jerusalem, having fallen into the same worthiness of judgment as Egypt, is now another Egypt. And God brings this locust plague on them too.

And in Revelation 11, where you find the bottomless pit is open and this, what is described as a locust plague occurs. I have to say that in my own understanding of Revelation, that's also talking about Jerusalem, coming on Jerusalem. So that Jerusalem, which is spiritually called Egypt, is experiencing some of the same plagues that Egypt did.

By the way, the locusts in Revelation, I'm sure you remember, are not very much like real locusts at all. They have tails like scorpions. They have hair like women and faces like men.

They have breastplates like bronze. These features obviously are symbolic. But they are described in terms that are somewhat reminiscent to the locusts in Joel.

Because in Joel chapter 1 and verse 6, describing these locusts, at the end of verse 6 it says, His teeth are the teeth of a lion and he has fangs of a fierce lion. Well, in this strange description of the so-called locusts in Revelation 11, it borrows imagery from Joel. Quite obviously.

Because in Revelation chapter 9 and verse 8, it says, describing the locusts, They had hair like a woman's hair. Their teeth were like a lion's teeth. Now, I don't know how many people would describe the teeth of a locust like a lion's teeth, but Joel did and Revelation does.

It seems like the imagery of Joel is deliberately repeated in the book of Revelation. Both of them refer to judgments coming on Jerusalem. One of actual locusts in Joel's time and the one in Revelation, I believe, is a later judgment.

Not of real locusts, but something symbolically called locusts that came on Jerusalem at a later time. But also, not only the lion's teeth, but also in Joel chapter 2, verse 4, speaking of the locusts, It says, their appearance is like the appearance of horses. And like the swift steeds, so they run with a noise like chariots.

Well, if you look at Revelation 9, the description of the locusts there in verse 7, It says the shape of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle. And then in verse 9, it says, and there, further on down in verse 9, it says, The sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots. So here you have locusts described as having teeth like lions, coming like horses, and like the sound of chariots.

And those are features that are taken from an actual locust plague that Joel describes, And are used figuratively to describe something that are likened to locusts in Revelation. I don't want to get into Revelation right now, everyone's always curious about that, But I have other controversial things to talk about as we go along. We'll talk about some of the later passages in Joel, and some of that will intercept with Revelation a little bit.

So we see that this actual locust plague is very severe, and it recalls the locust plague in Egypt, in Exodus. And it kind of foreshadows, or at least gives imagery to be borrowed by these visions in Revelation about locusts. And in the middle of those two, Exodus at the beginning of the Bible and Revelation at the end, We have this actual locust plague which seems to borrow language from Exodus and lend language to Revelation.

Okay, so the images of the locusts. I have to say that the locust plague is described as if it is an invasion of an army. Now most of the judgments that came on Israel and Jerusalem and Judah were in the form of armies.

Assyrians, Edomites, Philistines over the years, Babylon eventually. These were actually human armies, and those were ways in which God judged his people most of the time. And this prophecy speaks as if it's talking about an army of people.

For example, in verse 6 of chapter 1 it says, For a nation has come up against my land, strong and without number. Okay, talks about as a nation. In chapter 2 verse 2, about a third of the way through the verse, it says, Like the morning clouds spread over the mountains, a people come, great and strong.

Well that people who are coming are obviously the same as the nation that's coming, great and strong, without number. So they're described as a nation and as people. And if you look further on, they are referred to in chapter 2 verse 11 as the Lord's army.

The Lord gives his voice before his army. So the locusts are compared with a nation, with people, and with an army. And that's usually the way that God judged Israel, by bringing an army of people, a nation against them.

But it seems obvious as you read the whole book, this is not talking about a human army. Because we have him referring to them in chapter 2 verse 5. It says in the last line of chapter 2 verse 5, They're like a strong people, set in battle array. And in verse 7 it says, They run like mighty men.

They climb over the wall like men of war. It's the locusts that are being compared to an army. They're not really men, but they're like men.

Actually in verse 9 it says, They run to and fro in the city. They rush on the wall. They climb into the houses.

They enter the windows like a thief. Now they're not literally thieves, breaking into a house, coming through the window. By the way, armies, when they invade a nation, don't usually climb into people's houses through windows.

But when you don't have window screens and you've got a locust invasion, you've got locusts coming through the windows. The point here is that there's no question that the army involved is the locusts. Because it says this in chapter 2 verse 20, I will remove far from you the northern army.

But then he tells what they are. In verse 25, chapter 2 verse 25, Joel says, For I will restore to you the years that the swarming locusts have eaten, the crawling locusts, the consuming locusts, the chewing locusts, my great army, which I sent among you. So he talks about these four types of locusts again.

He says, these are the great army that I sent among you. They are like men. They are like mighty men.

They are like thieves breaking into your house. But they're really locusts. So one reason I bring this out is because there's a lot of different opinions about these locusts.

Of course, just reading the passage lightly, you realize there's locusts somewhere being

described here. But then you get the impression there's also an armed invasion. And you wonder, is there an armed invasion at the same time as a locust plague? And are they just intermixing the references to them in this section? Or is it that there's a locust plague in Joel's day, but it forbodes an armed invasion, which is seen maybe more in chapter 2. Or there's a very popular view among some Pentecostal groups.

And whatever may be said for or against Pentecostals, one thing that's obvious, and anyone who knows anything about the phenomenon, is Pentecostals are not known for their biblical scholarship. They're much more known for reading a passage and saying, oh, the Holy Spirit told me this is what it means, and often missing the context. And chapter 2, where it says, for example, they run like mighty men of war in verse 7. They climb over the wall like men of war.

Everyone marches in formation, and they do not break ranks. They do not push one another. Everyone marches in his own column.

When they lunge between the weapons, they are not cut down. They run to and fro in the city. They run on the wall.

They climb into the houses. And of course it says, the Lord gives his voice to his army. God's army.

There is a doctrine, very popular among some brands of Pentecostals, especially those who are part of the Manifest Sons of God movement. Also called the Latter Rain movement. This arose in the 1940s, and there's still plenty of it around, though they're in a minority.

But they always speak about Joel's army. And when they speak of Joel's army, they see it as the last day's victorious saints. In some cases, they believe that there will be overcomers, saints in the last generation of Christians before Jesus comes, who will already have their glorified bodies.

They'll be indestructible. There'll be a great army of Christian conquerors. And it's a very triumphalistic attitude that is manifest in this.

And they base it partly, mostly on this passage in Joel. In fact, there's a very popular song in the movement, which I've heard sung in churches that aren't even into the movement. They probably don't know what they're singing about.

But it's based on this verse. They run on the city, they rush on the wall. Great is the army that carries out his word.

The Lord utters his voice before his army. This is a popular worship song that came out of that movement. Now that movement's a small movement.

And Manifest Sons of God is largely a discredited movement, even among most Pentecostals. But it's still around. And I suppose I only mention it, even though you may never encounter it, but I encountered it a lot when I was a young teacher.

So I mean, I always think of them when I hear these verses from which their songs are taken. There's no basis at all for seeing the locust as referring to overcoming saints in the last days who have become invincible. There's that statement I read a moment ago in chapter 2, verse 8. At the end of verse 8, it says, when they lunge between the weapons, they're not cut down.

These Joel's Army people, they say, oh, that means they're indestructible. It's just saying that when you're invaded by an army of men, you can cut them down with swords. You're invaded by an army of locusts.

How are you going to defeat them with swords? Swing as you will. They'll go between the weapon strokes. I mean, they're just too small.

You can't fight off a plague of insects with weapons of war. So anyway, this is what we have to understand about this first part. I want to read this.

And then, of course, once we get done with the locust plague part, we'll look at the part about Pentecost and the rest in the latter part of the book. Let's start at the beginning. The word of the Lord that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel.

Hear this, you elders, and give ear all you inhabitants of the land. Has anything like this happened in your days or even in the days of your father? Tell your children about it. Let your children tell their children and their children and other generation.

What the chewing locust left, the swarming locust has eaten. What the swarming locust left, the crawling locust has eaten. What the crawling locust left, the consuming locust has eaten.

Awake, you drunkards, and weep and wail, all you drinkers of wine, because of the new wine for it has been cut off from your mouth. Wine comes from vineyards, and locusts have eaten all the vineyards. The drunkards who are addicted to wine, they're going to have to get used to withdrawal, and they'll be mourning.

For a nation has come up against my land, again, it's referring to the locust, strong and without number. His teeth are the teeth of the lion. He has the fangs of a fierce lion.

He has laid waste my vine and ruined my fig tree. He has stripped it bare and thrown it away. Its branches are made white.

The bark has been eaten off all the branches, so they're white. Lament, like a virgin girded with sackcloth, for the husband of her youth. Now, it must mean this, I think, how

strange to speak of a virgin having a husband.

Although, when a virgin was betrothed to be married, from the time of the betrothal, they were called husband and wife. When Mary and Joseph were not yet married, it says that Joseph went with Mary, his wife, to be registered in Bethlehem. And so, a betrothed fiancé was considered to be a husband or wife, though they're not really fully married yet.

And this is probably the virgin who has a betrothed husband, as it was referred to. The grain offering and the drink offering have been cut off from the house of the Lord. The priests mourn, who minister to the Lord.

The field is wasted, the land mourns, for the grain is ruined, and the new wine is dried up. The oil fails. Not only the drunkards are going to miss the wine, the priests are going to miss the wine.

And it talks about the grain offerings and the drink offerings. The drink offerings were wine, and they're offered with oil. Oil came from olive trees, it was not petroleum.

Oil is olive oil. So, you've got vines, you've got trees that produce oil and wine, and you've got the grain. And in the Old Testament, some of the offerings were called meal offerings or grain offerings.

And you know that the priests in the temple, or the tabernacle before that, actually ate that food. That's how they survived. Their income was partially the grain and so forth that was brought by the worshippers.

So, now they're not bringing it. And there's a double sadness about this. One is that God is not being worshipped in the traditional way.

He's not receiving his offerings in the temple. The other is the priests. They're not getting their food, and they're wailing too.

It says in verse 11, Be ashamed, you farmers! Wail, you wine dressers! For the wheat and the barley, because the harvest of the field is perished. The vine has dried up, the fig tree has withered, the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree. All trees of the field are withered.

Surely joy has withered away from the sons of men. Gird yourselves and lament, you priests! Wail, you who minister before the altar! Come lie all night in sackcloth, you who minister to my God! For the grain offering and the drink offering are withheld from the house of your God. Consecrate a fast.

Now here's the first call to repentance. There's a longer one later in chapter 2. This is a brief one. Consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly, gather the elders and all the

inhabitants of the land into the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord.

Alas for the day, for the day of the Lord is at hand. It shall come as a destruction from the Almighty. So here we see that this locust plague is referred to as the day of the Lord.

It is not the food cut off before our eyes, joy and gladness from the house of our God. The seed grain shrivels under the clods. Storehouses are in shambles.

Barns are broken down. You know, if the locust plague lasted for years, you're not going to be using your granaries. You won't have any grain to put them, so the structures that you usually store them in go unrepaired.

You know, because you're not needing them. You're not using them, so they kind of fall apart eventually. So storehouses are in shambles.

Barns are broken down. For the grain has withered. How the beasts groan.

The herds of cattle are restless, because they have no pasture. Even the flocks of sheep suffer your punishment. Now, when sheep and cattle, of course, they live on grass, when the locusts eat all the grass, then Israel is going to be left not only without fruit and vegetables and grain, but not going to have any cattle either.

They won't be eating meat either, or milk, or dairy products. Basically, everything they eat is basically threatened by this plague. He says, Oh Lord, to you I cry out, for fire has devoured the open pastures, and flame has burned all the trees of the field.

The beasts of the field also cry out to you, for the water brooks are dried up, and fire has devoured the open pastures. Now, it sounds as if, in addition to locust plague, there's fires burning stuff up, and maybe a drought, because the streams are all dry. I think it's probably not to be understood that way.

If the locusts have eaten all the vegetation, there's not really much to burn to keep a fire going. It's almost certain, I think, that the fire consuming everything is really a figurative way of saying what the locusts are doing. It's like the damage done by the locusts is as bad to the crops as if there had been fire burning them up, or as if there had been no water, as if the creeks had all dried up, and irrigation was impossible.

The reason I say that is that in chapter 2, in verse 3, which is talking about the locust army, it says, A fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns. The land is like the Garden of Eden in front of them, and behind them a desolate wilderness. Surely nothing shall escape them.

So it's as if it's a scorched earth policy. It could be like the Garden of Eden in front of them, but once they go by, it's like a burned scorched earth. It's really the locusts eating it.

It's not literal fire. It's very common for, of course, this is all poetry, to compare the locust damage with that of fire or with drought. Any of those things would be devastating to their food supplies.

Chapter 2, Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain. Usually a trumpet would be sounded as an alarm when armies are invading. There were watchmen on the walls of the city, and if an army was coming, they'd blow the trumpet to wake everyone up in the city and to alarm the soldiers to arm themselves and be ready to defend the city.

So it's basically saying we're being invaded here. Blow the trumpet, warn everyone, sound the alarm in my holy mountain. Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming, for it is at hand, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness.

Like the morning clouds spread over the mountains, a people come, great and strong, the like of whom has never been, nor will there ever be any such after them, even for many successive generations. A fire devours before them, behind them the flame burns. The land is like the Garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness.

Surely nothing shall escape them. Their appearance is like the appearance of horses, and like the swift steeds, so they run, with a noise like chariots over mountaintops. They leap, locusts literally do leap, although they usually travel longer distance by flying.

Like the noise of a flaming fire that devours the stubble, like the strong people set in battle array. So it's saying the locusts are like a flaming fire. They're like an army.

These are different metaphors being used for the locusts. There's not apparently a literal fire burning things up. Before them the people are in pain.

All faces are drained of color. They run like mighty men. They climb the wall like men of war.

Everyone marches in formation, and they do not break ranks. They do not push one another. Everyone marches in his own column.

Now this is another confirmation that it's talking really about locusts, not about real armies. Not that the same thing couldn't be said about a real army, but the same thing is said about locusts elsewhere. In Proverbs chapter 30 and verse 27, when Agur is talking about various things that are too wise for him or whatever he's marveling at, he talks in Proverbs 30 verse 27, the locusts have no king, but they all advance in ranks.

So I mean, they come like an army marching in ranks, in waves perhaps, and as if they were guided by some commander or king. And so we do read of that very thing. They are coming in formation.

They don't break ranks. As we mentioned earlier, it says that when they lunge between the weapons, they're not cut down. They run to and fro in the city.

They run on the walls. They climb into the houses. They're like a thief.

The earth quakes before them. This again is probably apocalyptic imagery because judgments from God are often like an earthquake. But there could be something literal about this.

I mean, when you've got gazillions of locusts flying, they make a sound, kind of a low thunderous sound. It might feel like the earth is shaking from this loud hum of locusts. Or it might be that the people are quaking.

The people on the earth are quaking because they see what's coming. The earth quakes before them. The heavens tremble.

The sun and the moon grow dark. The stars diminish their brightness. The Lord gives his voice before his army for his camp is very great, for strong is the one who executes his word.

For the day of the Lord is great and very terrible. Who can endure it? So obviously we're still looking at the locust plague. But now we have the call to repentance, which is the second part of the message.

Now therefore, says the Lord, turn to me with your heart, with all your heart, with fasting and weeping. So rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness, and he relents from doing harm.

Who knows if he will turn and relent and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the Lord your God. You never know, but God might spare a little bit of our products if we repent, at least enough to offer to him in the temple our normal grain and drink offerings. Second time, blow the trumpet in Zion.

Consecrate it fast. Now when he first said blow the trumpet in Zion, that was chapter 2, verse 1, that was your typical alarm signal. Invasion is coming, blow the alarm, waking everyone up.

It's like we're at war. But the second blow the trumpet was to consecrate a fast. Like you would, for example, on Yom Kippur or something like that.

When they would fast, the day would begin with a trumpet blast. And so, you know, different meanings for trumpet blasts are found in the Old Testament. And essentially he uses the same expression but with a different meaning here.

Instead of sounding alarm, he's rallying people to fast and seek God. Call a sacred

assembly. Gather the people.

Sanctify the congregation. Assemble the elders. Gather the children and nursing babies.

Let the bridegroom go out from his chamber and the bride from her dressing room. This is suggesting that even in the course of, you know, they're preparing for a wedding that day. The bride's putting on her bride's clothes, the groom's with his, you know, friends getting ready to come out of the chamber to get married.

Now, let's put that off. Call off the wedding for now. We need to fast.

We need to pray, not celebrate and feast. Let the priests who minister to the Lord weep between the porch and the altar. Let them say, spare your people, O Lord, and do not give your heritage to reproach that the nation should rule over them.

Why should they say among themselves, the peoples, where is their God? Now, actually, this speaks of a really desperate kind of praying. Crying out to God. Now, I'm sure you pray.

Christians do. Christians pray. How often when you pray do you, could you describe your praying as crying out to God? It's a very common phrase in the Bible, but I think not very commonly practiced.

How often are we that desperate? That we're crying out like people, you know, drowning in the ocean, crying out for someone whose life is in danger and calling out for someone to rescue them. I'm sure, I'm sure sometimes our prayers are that desperate, but a lot of times we don't feel desperate. And we are more desperate than we know.

I think to fast, to seek God, to pray all night, to cry out to God is something that Christians don't do often enough. They certainly don't assemble for that purpose often enough. And, you know, we're living in a time where we're kind of plagued in this country.

We have a different kind of, insect, you know, that's eating away at our society and seeking to destroy it, which I won't name here. That would, that would time stamp this lecture too much. But we are certainly living at a time where we are, we've got scoundrels destroying our nation.

And that being so, I don't think it's asking too much that Christians should get together and fast and pray and cry out to God for mercy, because frankly, I believe our society is probably as endangered in a different way as Judah was at this time by the locusts. Now, having called them to repent and cry out to God, there's now the promise of deliverance, what God will do assuming that they do this. He says, then the Lord will be zealous for his land rather than zealous about destroying it and pity his people.

The Lord will answer and say to his people, behold, I will send you grain and new wine and oil and you'll be satisfied by them. I will no longer make you a reproach among the nations. I will remove far from you the northern army, meaning the locusts, and will drive them away into the barren and desolate land with face toward the Eastern Sea, which would be the Mediterranean, excuse me, that would be the Dead Sea and his back toward the Western Sea, which is the Mediterranean.

They will go up. That's because they'll be dead. All these locusts do eventually kind of die around the same time too.

And then their bodies begin to, once they're full, locusts can get big and fat when they're gorging themselves. And then there's a lot to stink as they rot. Honestly, I've heard that from people who've experienced locust plagues.

It says the stench will go up. His foul odor will rise because he has done monstrous things. Fear not, O land, be glad and rejoice for the Lord has done marvelous things.

Interestingly, the last phrase in verse 20 is that the locusts have done monstrous things. The last phrase in the next verse is that God has done marvelous things. Both monstrous and marvelous are the same word in the Hebrew, simply great.

Well, in the Hebrew it just says the locusts have done great things. It says God has done great things. That is to say his response has been equal to the challenge and to the damage that's been done.

Now, why did the new King James translate one of these monstrous and the other marvelous? Perhaps they knew, first of all, that this is the aspect of great that is implied in the respective verses. It's monstrously great things that locusts have done and marvelously great things God has done. But it may be that the translators didn't want to make it sound like the locusts and God were kind of doing the same things.

I'm not sure what the translators had in mind. But in both cases in the Hebrew it says that great things have been done by first the locusts, then by God. Do not be afraid, you beasts of the field, for the open pastures are springing up and the tree bears its fruit.

The fig tree and the vine yield their strength. Be glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God, for he has given you the former rain faithfully, and it will cause the rain to come down upon you, the former rain and the latter rain in the first month. The threshing floors shall be full of wheat, and the vats will overflow with new wine and oil.

So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the crawling locust, the consuming locust, and the chewing locust, my great army which I sent among you. You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God who has dealt wondrously with you. And my people shall never be put to shame.

Then you shall know that I am in the midst of Israel and that I am the Lord your God, and there is no other. My people shall never be put to shame. Now this is the end of the locust subject, and we're going to take a break before we come to the second part of the book which is about Pentecost and the age of the Holy Spirit that is initiated there.

We'll start up again, and we will use the rest of the time to talk about the part of Joel that is quoted in the New Testament and applied to the New Testament, applied actually to us. So Joel's been talking about things that applied to his generation, which is a very ancient one, far removed from us, but then he jumps ahead to talk about things that are directly related to us as Christians. So we'll stop here and come back and do that.